



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Santa Fe National Forest

Espanola Ranger District
P.O. Box 3307, Fairview Station
1710 N. Riverside Dr.
Espanola, New Mexico 87533
505-753-7331 FAX 505-753-9411

File Code: 2230-3

Date: April 1, 2003

Dear Mr. Vigil,

This letter constitutes the year 2003 Annual Operating Instruction for the Oso/Vallecitos Allotment. As discussed during our annual validation meeting March 4, 2003 it is my decision to delay entry on the Oso/Vallecitos Allotment to June 1, 2003 and initially authorize 50% of permitted numbers. If conditions warrant entry date, and livestock numbers may be adjusted dependent on range readiness, current drought conditions, and condition of range facilities, particularly fences. If resource conditions prior to permitted livestock turnout warrant a modification of entry date and livestock numbers, I have the discretion to rescind this decision and issue a different decision to reflect needed changes. I have issued this decision to inform the Oso/Vallecitos permittees the worse case scenario and to allow ample opportunity for the permittees to make adjustments to their livestock operations.

This decision is based on past and current drought conditions and current known range condition on the allotment. As you may be aware Range Improvement Taskforce data collected in 2002 indicated forage use levels were exceeded in four of the five key areas. Utilization levels recorded the fall of 2002 in the Chamisos pasture indicated use to be at 55%, which is 15% above prescribed use levels of 40%. In addition use levels recorded in the mountain unit indicated use as high as 80% in the Gallina Mesa key area.

In our March 4 validation meeting in coordination with New Mexico Game and Fish (NMGF) we discussed a number of issues relevant to grazing on the Oso/Vallecitos Allotment. Below is a list of key action items we agreed to work on prior to livestock entry on the allotment.

1. Locate additional key areas on the allotment using the following criteria:



- a. Areas with forage production potential greater than 100 pounds/acre.
- b. Greater than 100 yards away from fences, roads and trails.
- c. On Forest Service administered lands.
- d. Between $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ mile from water.
- e. On slope less than 15%.
- f. Within the same range site and greater than five acres.
- g. Areas considered having overlapping elk use.

As we discussed, these key areas and associated monitoring cages and transects will be jointly identified and located in coordination with the Oso/Vallecitos permittees, NMGF agency representatives, and Española Ranger District personnel. I would like to schedule April 12, 2003 to begin to jointly identify these areas. This will allow us to monitor elk use prior to livestock entry. Key areas at a minimum will be monitored monthly to assess elk use, current production and range readiness as we discussed at our validation meeting.

2. Evaluate criteria for livestock turnout during monitoring. We discussed and reviewed the following material during our validation meeting. These tools will assist us in ensuring appropriate livestock turnout. a) Range readiness standards for the Santa Fe National Forest (handout), b) Use of the Standardized Precipitation Index (handout) to identify current drought conditions, and c) inspection of allotment boundary fence particularly in areas that have had livestock drift out of the allotment.
3. Coordinate placement of mineral blocks and Crystallex in upland areas of the allotment in an attempt to draw elk away from key areas. NMGF has committed to provide the mineral lick and air support to drop mineral licks in remote upland areas. As an example, the south-facing slope of Polvadera peak was discussed as a potential location. These mineral licks will be placed as soon as possible to attempt to draw elk, particularly cow elk away from key areas during the early spring period.
4. Reconstruct non-functioning fences in the allotment. I have directed Donald Serrano of my Staff to provide fence materials to the Oso/Vallecitos permittees to reconstruct non-functioning fences that are identified as your maintenance responsibilities on your term permit, but are beyond your ability to maintain due to their overall condition. Reconstruction of identified fences would occur under the permit modification process where the Forest Service would provide the materials and the permittees would provide transportation and labor in constructing these fences. In addition, NMGF has committed to provide PVC pipe for the top wire to minimize damage to fences when elk are crossing these areas. Functioning fences are critical to the long-term management of the Oso/Vallecitos allotment.
5. If monitoring of key areas indicates significant elk use, NMGF is committed to removing elk from these areas. In order of priority NMGF discussed three methods: Evaluate effectiveness of mineral licks, use of pyrotechnic devices to scare elk, and as a last resort initiate predation hunts on elk in these areas. Subsequent discussions with NMGF indicates that predation hunts may not be allowed on federal lands under current regulations. However NMGF is committed to demonstrating their willingness to ensure parity between elk and livestock numbers.

6. Assist permittees in requesting livestock use in the Valles Caldera during the spring non-use period. It should be noted however that the Valles Caldera Board of Trustees have sole authority in authorizing livestock use on the Caldera.

I. GRAZING SCHEDULE

Authorized Use on the Oso/Vallecitos allotment is shown below

PERMITTEE NAME	NUMBER OF CATTLE/SEASON OF USE					
	Permitted	Permitted season of use	2002 % actual use*	2003 authorized	2003 authorized season of use	2003 % authorized use*
Jerry Archuleta	10	5/1 – 10/31	100	5	6/1 – 10/31	42
Johnny Jaramillo	33	5/1 – 10/31	100	17	6/1 – 10/31	43
Elfidio Lopez	9	5/1 – 10/31	78	5	6/1 – 10/31	46
Joseph Lopez	101	5/1 – 10/31	89	51	6/1 – 10/31	42
Juan Lopez	66	5/1 – 10/31	100	33	6/1 – 10/31	41
Gabe Lopez	27	5/1 – 10/31	100	14	6/1 – 10/31	43
Leroy Lopez	30	5/1 – 10/31	100	15	6/1 – 10/31	41
Benny Ortega	76	5/1 – 10/31	100	38	6/1 – 10/31	41
Jack Trujillo	20	5/1 – 10/31	100	10	6/1 – 10/31	41
Virgil Trujillo	139	5/1 – 10/31	86	70	6/1 – 10/31	42
Alex Vigil	38	5/1 – 10/31	0	0	6/1 – 10/31	0
Oso Vallecitos Grazing Association	24	5/1 – 10/31	100	12	6/1 – 10/31	41
TOTAL	573		88	270		38

* Use is based on a combination of time and number of cattle.

Pasture schedule for the Oso/Vallecitos Allotment is shown below. During our Annual Validation meeting we were unable to come to a consensus on a pasture schedule. This schedule is subject to change based on group input and actual turnout of livestock numbers.

GROUP A	NUMBER OF CATTLE	GROUP B	NUMBER OF CATTLE	GROUP C	NUMBER OF CATTLE
Jerry Archuleta	5	Virgil Trujillo	60	Juan Lopez	33
Johnny Jaramillo	17	Benny Ortega	38	Gabe Lopez	14
Elfidio Lopez	5	Alex Vigil	0		
Joseph Lopez	51				
Leroy Lopez	15				
Jack Trujillo	10				
TOTAL	103		98		47

Group A		Group B		Group C	
Unit	Date	Unit	Date	Unit	Date
Chamisos	6/1 – 7/1	Clara Peak	6/1 – 7/1	Cerro Pelon	6/1 – 7/1
Vallecitos	Trailing	Gallina Mesa	7/1 – 9/20	Mountain	7/1 – 9/20
Mountain	7/1 – 9/20	Potrero	9/20 – 10/2	Cerro Pelon	9/20 – 10/31
Puerto (subunit of Mountain)	7/1 – 9/20	Vallecitos	Trailing*		
Potrero	9/20 – 10/2	Chamisos	10/2 – 10/31		
Vallecitos	Trailing				
Chamisos	10/2 – 10/31				

Current drought conditions may require that cattle be moved through the units quicker or removed from the allotment earlier than expected. This decision will be made in cooperation with you and based on the utilization for key species on agreed upon and field verified key areas.

The District Ranger in coordination with grazing permittees may change the routing plan described above when unforeseen circumstances such as lack of water in pasture or over use within the pasture. The grazing association or the permittees can propose changes of pastures outside of the above routing plan in coordination with this office. The grazing association or permittees, should submit a written justification to this office or coordinate with Donald Serrano of my Staff if a routing plan needs to be changed. The decision made by the District Ranger will be based upon the condition of the range, recommendations of the range staff, and the needs of the permittees.

II. COUNTING AND TAGGING

New tagging is not scheduled for this year. As identified in your grazing permit the calf counter policy is “Any animal 6 months of age or older as of January 1 is considered a counter. Calves less than 6 months of age as of January 1 become counters on March 1. All weaned animals are counters regardless of age.”

III. EXCESS USE

As stated in Part 3 of your term grazing permit, “Livestock grazed in excess of the numbers, outside of the period use, or of a class or kind not authorized in the current Bill for Collection. When the annual application is approved, in whole or in part, livestock grazed in excess of authorized numbers must be removed from lands of the National Forest System. Grazing use by livestock in excess of that authorized in the current Bill for Collection is cause for cancellation and/or suspension of the permit in whole or part and must be assessed at the "unauthorized use rate”.

IV. UTILIZATION/MONITORING

The proper utilization of forage is a critical factor in livestock management on the Oso/Vallecitos allotment. As discussed earlier monitoring will be scheduled regularly to insure that utilization levels are within recommended levels. As always grazing association directors and permittees are encouraged to participate while these evaluations are being made. Methods for monitoring utilization are adopted from Holecheck and DeGalt (2000). This method was briefly presented at the annual validation meeting. The following table on the next page describes utilization levels, we agreed to for the 2003-grazing season.

Use indicators and levels are highlighted below and generally correlate to 40% use on forage plants.

Qualitative Grazing Intensity Category	Use of Forage by Weight	Qualitative Indicators of Grazing Intensity
Light to non-use	0-30	Only choice plants (key species) and areas show use. There is no use of poor forage plants
Conservative	31-40	Choice forage plants (key species) have abundant seed stalks; Areas more than a mile from water show little use: About one third to one half primary forage plants show grazing on key areas.
Moderate	41-50	Most of accessible range show use; Key areas show patchy appearance with one half to two thirds of primary forage plants (key species) showing use; Grazing is noticeable 1-1½ miles from water
Heavy	51-60	Nearly all primary forage plants show grazing on key areas: Palatable shrubs show hedging: Key areas show a lack of seed stalks: Grazing is noticeable in areas over 1½ miles from water
Severe	61+	Key areas show a clipped or mowed appearance (no stubble ht.): Shrubs are severely hedged; There is evidence of livestock trailing to forage; Areas over 1½ miles from water lack stubble height.

Within the Mountain Unit pasture of the Oso/Vallecitos allotment the key forage species and desired stubble height are highlighted in the table below:

Table 5. Grazing intensity guide for mountain grassland rangeland in New Mexico (Holechek & Galt, 6/00, Rangelands)						
Qualitative Grazing Intensity Category	Use of Forage by Weight	Stubble Height Indicators of Grazing Intensity				
		Arizona Fescue		Bluegrass		Intermediate Wheatgrass
	---(%)-- -	-----Inches-----				
Light to none-use	0-30	8+		5+		8+
Conservative	31-40	6-7		4-5		6-7
Moderate	41-50	5-6		3-4		5-6
Heavy	51-60	4-5		2-3		4-5
Severe	61+	<4		<2		<4

Within the Chamisos and Cerro Pelon pastures of the Oso/Vallecitos allotment the key forage species and desired stubble height are highlighted in the table below:

Table 4. Grazing intensity guide for shortgrass-pinyon/juniper rangeland in New Mexico (Holechek & Galt, 6/00, Rangelands)				
Qualitative Grazing Intensity Category	Use of Forage by Weight	Stubble Height Indicators of Grazing Intensity		
		Blue Grama		Western Wheatgrass
	(%)	----- Inches-----		
Light to non-use	0-30	2.5+		7.0+
Conservative	31-40	2.0-2.5		4.0-5.0
Moderate	41-50	1.5-2.0		3.0-4.0
Heavy	51-60	1.0-1.5		2.0-3.0
Severe	61+	<1.0		<2.0

Both the Forest Service and the permittee are responsible for monitoring use and stubble height on the allotment to ensure that proper use levels are **not exceeded**. If areas within a pasture or the pasture as a whole begin to approach the identified stubble heights, actions will need to be taken to limit additional forage use. We are especially concerned with use levels in riparian areas and canyon bottoms where cattle tend to concentrate use on palatable feed.

Forage use patterns, cattle numbers, salting practices, and coordination of improvements should be monitored periodically to determine when livestock should be moved between pastures. If use within that key area is approaching allowable stubble heights then the remaining key areas will also be monitored and the pasture inspected to determine overall use patterns. This information will be used to determine if cattle need to be re-distributed within the pasture or removed from the pasture.

V. IMPROVEMENT WORK

There are no new projects scheduled for this year other than the action items listed at the beginning of the document.

VI. SPECIAL MITIGATION MEASURES

In order to conform with Amendment of Forest Plans and the final U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service "Biological Opinion for Ongoing Livestock Grazing Activities on Allotments" which determine a No Affect and/or May Affect Not Likely to Adversely Affect on your allotment, **the following conditions must be met.**

Forage Utilization

Forage use by grazing animals will be maintained at or above a condition, which assures recovery and continued existence of threatened and endangered species. In order to attain this

standard, the above site-specific key areas and key forage utilization standards have been developed for the Oso/Vallecitos Allotment.

Mineral Supplements/Salt Blocks

Mineral supplement/Salt block sites will be regularly rotated to reduce trampling and grazing impacts to vegetation. Cutting salt blocks in half before distributing them on the range is an easy way to avoid having to move them, as they get used before they need to be moved. In addition, all salt must be at a minimum ¼ mile from any water source.

VII. ADMINISTRATIVE APPEAL

District Ranger decisions regarding issuance, denial, or administration of grazing and livestock use permits may be appealed in accordance with 36 CFR 251, Subpart C. The following standard paragraph is included in this Annual Operating Plan for the purpose of ensuring that you are aware of your appeal rights.

This Annual Operating Instruction (AOI) is hereby made a part of your term grazing permit.

This decision is subject to administrative review pursuant to 36 CFR 251, Subpart C and any appeal of this decision must be fully consistent with 36 CFR 251.90 (see attached). In accordance with 36 CFR 251.84, if you file an appeal, I am willing to meet with you to discuss any concerns you may have with my decision. If you file an appeal, you may request an oral presentation in the appeal or at any time prior to closing of the appeal record (36 CFR 251.97). Additionally, if you file an appeal, you may request a stay of my decision in the appeal or at any time prior to closing of the appeal record (36 CFR 251.91).

A notice of appeal, including the reasons for appeal, must be filed with Leonard Atencio, Forest Supervisor, Santa Fe National Forest, P.O. Box 1689, Santa Fe, New Mexico 87504-1689 within 45 days of the date of this decision. A copy of the notice of appeal must be filed simultaneously with myself John Miera, Espanola District Ranger, at, P.O. Box 3307, Fairview Station, 1710 N. Riverside Dr., Espanola, New Mexico 87533.

I appreciate you contacting me to resolve disagreements before you file any Notice to Appeal. This will insure that we both understand the reasons for each other's position regarding any issues. If you have any further questions concerning this matter please contact Donald Serrano of my Staff at the above phone or address.

Sincerely,

/s/ John P. Miera
JOHN P. MIERA
Espanola District Ranger